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ABSTRACT

Waulking is the process of shrinking tweed into a tightly woven cloth by rolling the wool into a tube and pounding it on the table in a rhythmic pattern. In the Outer Hebrides, off the western coast of Scotland, this process is traditionally done while singing. During waulking, the songs that were sung gave information about the social structure and were oriented to the various events of the women's and men's lives. The social, physical, and vocal bonds which were involved served to alleviate the monotony of this task. An analysis of the socializing and work purposes of the waulking song, "The Boat Will Come," is presented. The musical cadences of the song coordinate with the physical beats of waulking the wool. In addition to the social aspects of the waulking songs, another consideration is the practical work purpose. The melody is more satisfying to the working women than the task of pounding the cloth in a monotonous pattern. The physical cadence helps to maintain the group's cohesiveness which is critical to maintain the evenness of the cloth texture. The verse and refrain serve to match the time required to complete the waulking. The Gaelic text and music of the song are provided in an appendix. (SM)

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The Scottish Waulking Song

"The Boat Will Come"

by

Donna Dee Hardy

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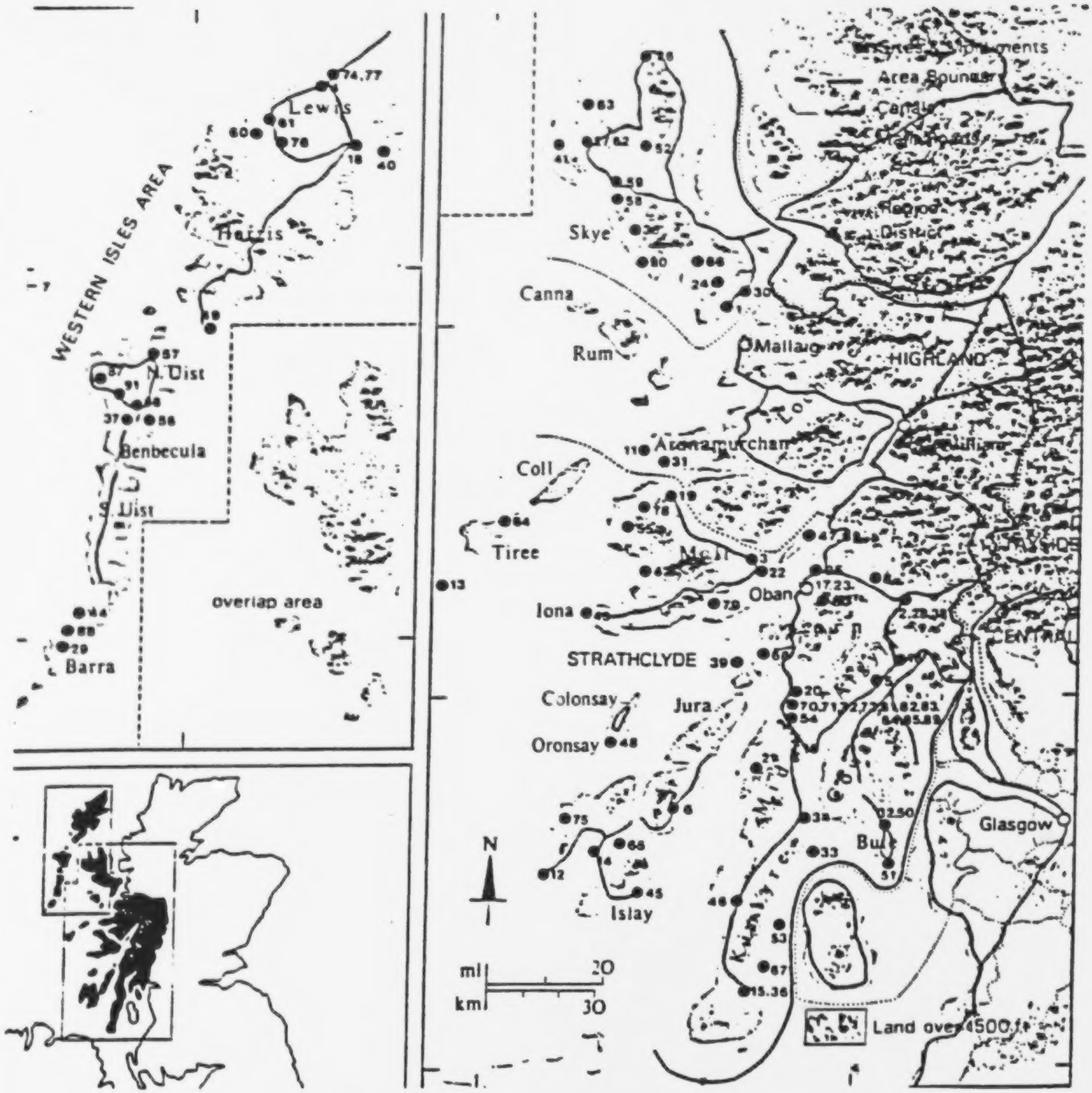
WESTERN ISLES AREA
Lewis
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Benbecula
S. Uist
Barra
overlap area
Skye
Canna
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Ardnamurchan
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Tiree
Mull
Iona
Oban
STRATHCLYDE
CENTRAL
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Jura
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Kintyre
Bute
Glasgow
Area Boundaries
Canals
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Land over 1500 ft
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The Scottish Waulking Song

"The Boat Will Come"

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In the Outer Isles of the Outer Hebrides, off the western coast of Scotland, the traditional practices of singing while waulking, which is the process of shrinking tweed into a tightly woven cloth, was both a social and practical event. This working activity was observed and documented as early as the mid-sixteenth to the mid-twentieth century. "Orain luaidh," (the Gaelic waulking song) was to be sung only on land by the illiterate women who waulked the wool. Various islands where waulking has been observed in the Hebrides include: Barra, Harris, Lewis, South Uist and North Uist. On these islands the native language is still Gaelic. This process of waulking or fulling was first carried out by women who used their feet and then their hands. Men were not to be present when the women did this. During this work, the songs that were sung gave information about the social structure and were oriented to the various events of the women and men's lives. The social, physical, and vocal bonds which were involved must have served to alleviate the monotony of this important task.

Before starting the waulking process, the cloth is attached at both ends to create a tube as each woman held a section. Usually a team of six to twelve women, divided into equal numbers, sat across from each other with a long board or door between them with a piece of cloth set on the top.

At this stage the cloth is very heavy because it had been soaked in a urine solution. A photograph of this process will be found in Appendix A.

During the waulking, the women pass the cloth in a clockwise (deiseil) manner which is believed to be a Celtic tradition. The tempi of the songs was quick, but gradually it accelerated as the cloth became lighter. These songs were not the soothing type that the women heard during their working days of weaving, milking, churning and other solitary chores. For example, a woman was very careful to use a calming and gentle type of song while milking the cows.

Different waulking patterns exist, but a common clockwise thumping pattern had four movements. Collinson (p. 68) describes this as follows (see Appendix B):

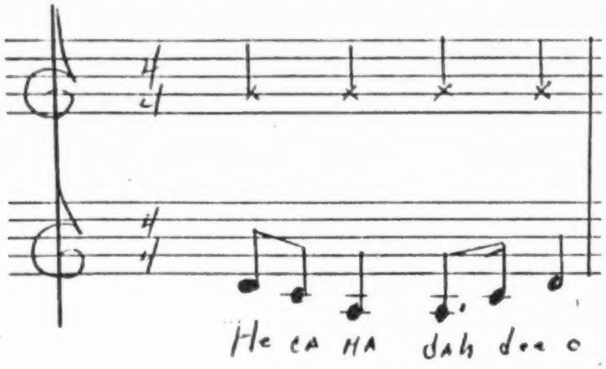
> ...one, the cloth is grasped in front of the sitter and thumped on the table where it lies; two, it is pushed outwards towards the centre of the table and thumped on the table at the end of the stroke; three, it is brought back to the first position close to the sitter, again with a final thump and there released. The cloth is grasped afresh in front of the sitter, and the sequence is repeated endlessly for as many times as there are verses to the song.

The practical result of this work was the processed cloth, a vital part of their lives. The women wanted protection for their men against the elements of the hazardous seas and damp forests. Another result of this activity which often lasted for a half an hour (unless the cloth was for the fishermen which meant twice the amount of time was required) was that festivities would take place. The women, men and children would celebrate when this process was completed.

Although waulking was a task performed by women, all people, women, men, and children would celebrate.

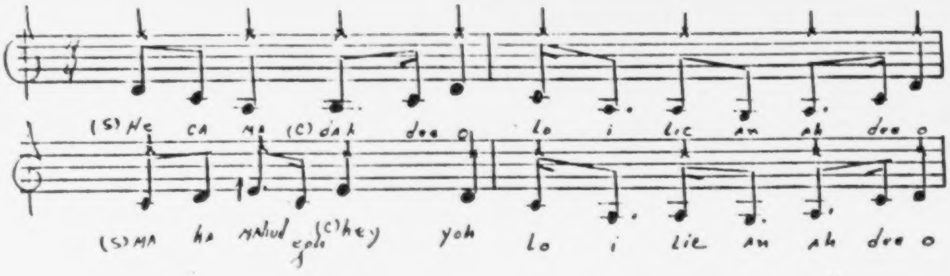
What are the socializing and work purposes of the "orain luaidh"? For the answers, I shall first address the socializing purposes through analyzing the music, specifically, the waulking song "Thig am bata" (The Boat Will Come). I chose this song from thirty waulking songs because of its length and unusual feature of starting with the leader. Eight points shall be discussed. First, there is a melody for the soloist and the chorus of waulkers. The more important part of these two is the chorus.

The following example of the chorus and solo cites the solo part beginning the song after the designated pounding pattern begins. This example is unusual because the chorus frequently starts the song. (The example has been transposed up a major third for clarity.)



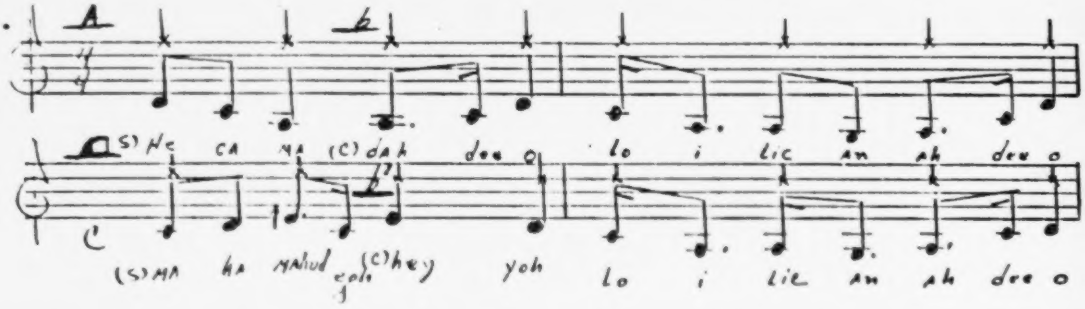
The second socializing purpose is the cadence of the pounding pattern and that of the musical phrases. These musical cadences coordinate with the physical beats; but, they also submit to closure during the fourth beat in three of the four phrases of the song.

The following is an example of the pounding cadence with the musical cadences:


(S) He ca ma (C) dah doo o lo i lie an ah doo o
(S) ma ha mahud epo (C) hey yoh lo i lie an ah doo o

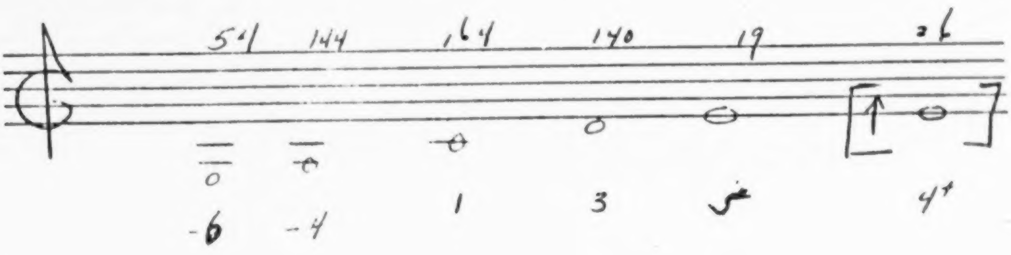
The third consideration is the verse and refrain or solo and chorus parts. The leader chooses the subject for the verse and the refrain is repeated throughout the length of the song. In this particular example, "The Boat Will Come" both the verse and chorus are very short. The soloist sings only two beats before the chorus joins her. The chorus part lasts for six beats. The result is the effect of a dialogue. Due to the quickness of each section, one singer usually cannot sway the group into another musical melody or rhythm. There are too many women pulling toward the set chorus line. The repetition serves as a cohesive element to women who were illierate. That is, these women would feel a security about singing a song which would not require an exceptional memory or reading experience. Thus, for an average song of twelve minutes or possibly longer, short phrases would be easy to remember while executing a physically coordinated pattern with other women. This frequency of singing would aid in their concentration during a rather difficult and not especially attractive job.

Example of the verse and refrain which demonstrates an abca' type of waulking song.


A
b
(s) He ca na (c) dah doo o lo i lic an ah dro o
C
(s) ma ha nahud (c) hey yoh lo i lie an ah dro o

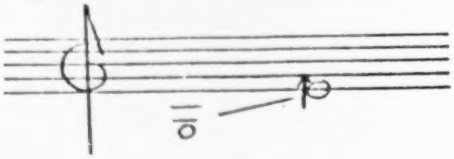
The fourth consideration is the repetition and length of the song. The singers help each other's concentration by the group participation and by focusing on both the working and the singing. The repetition can serve to energize the participants by the pull of the surrounding sounds and the interest in the new information given by the soloist for each of her verses. The cloth would be checked at times to test its tightness. In general the length of the song may be at least tweleve minutes but an important change would occur during the length of the waulking process. That is, as the cloth lost its moisture it became lighter and the pounding and singing tempo would accelerate.

The fifth element is the musical scale. Many waulking songs are pentatonic with the unusual examples having four notes or more than five. A partial example of the Gaelic and English text of "The Boat Will Come" will be found in Appendix C. This song is based on the following pentatonic scale cited below.



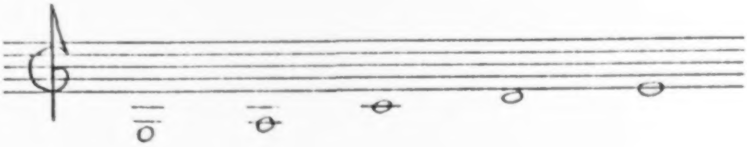
It would seem practical to conclude that the pentatonic mode was not difficult for the women to learn and retain. For example, there was no evidence of the women practicing these songs in preparation for the waulking event. Also, the range of the song needed to be comfortable for the women.

The women's voices were frequently low and centered in the middle part of the bass clef. This particular song is focused in the lower part of the treble clef with lower tones placed on ledger lines. (The example has been transposed down a half step for clarity.)



The following shows that the song is based on a particular arrangement of this pentatonic.

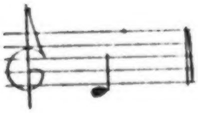
(G,A,C,D,and E)



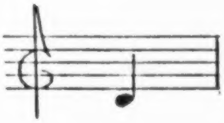
The sixth consideration is the possible variance in the solo part. This would refer to the possible addition of an "o." When this is added, the soloist adds an extra beat causing the strong pulse to shift to where the weak pulse was formerly felt. This unusual feature is not found in this particular song transcription even though it is an unusual feature of a work song. This variance is heard in other waulking songs. When this additional "o" occurs, the entire group would be affected by this extra beat throughout the remainder of the song. There is no preparation for this addition given by the soloist; it seems to be at the discretion of the leader and is immediately followed by the group's change in their stressed and unstressed beats.

The seventh point is the commencing and ending of a song. Prior to the song, the waulking pattern is begun. This not only serves to begin the physical labor pattern, but also it sets the tempo for the singing. The entire group of women first begin the waulking, then the singing follows; however, when concluding, both the waulking and the singing end simultaneously. The ending of the song is abrupt without any degree of ritardando. From the beginning to the end, the song increases in tempo because of the cloth being less wet and consequently lighter and easier to handle. The energy level of the women naturally changes, and perhaps this is the reason or one of the reasons that I noted the change in pitch from the start of this song to its conclusion. The change was approximately one half step lower for the ending of the last chorus.

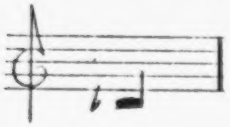
Beginning solo



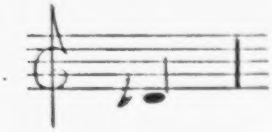
End of verse one chorus



Beginning solo

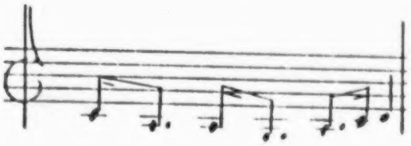


End of final chorus

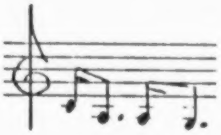


The eighth point is the rhythm and its effect on the social aspect of waulking. The longest duration in this song is the quarter note, and the shortest duration is the sixteenth note aside from short glissandos into pitches. One could describe the rhythm as being constantly active, when emitting a sense of drive and energy. There is not an accompanying rhythm except for the steady pounding of the cloth. The workers must feel and stay with the other members of the waulking group. The dotted rhythms and Scottish snaps would serve to energize the workers to help continue the sustained task. The vitality of the rhythms is found mostly in the chorus parts of this particular song. In the different verses the soloist has several interesting rhythms which are required by the Gaelic text.

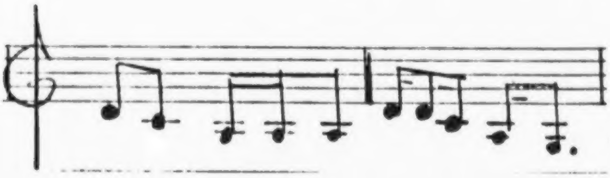
Chorus rhythms



Scottish Snap



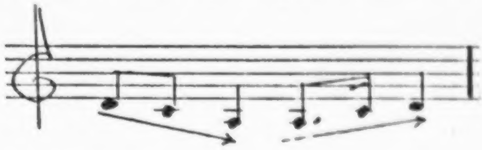
Some verse rhythms



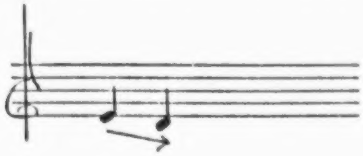
In addition to the social aspects of the waulking songs, the other consideration I shall address is the practical work purpose. First, the melody certainly is emotionally more satisfying to the working women than the task of pounding the cloth in a monotonous pattern. A forward movement is propelled by the melody, which mirrors an undulating pattern of the music which is often described as an imitation of the movement of the sea. Also, I believe the natural balance between the tension and release of the musical phrase would help to allow frequent psychological rests even though the women do not rest physically.

Melodic contour (imitating the movement of the sea)

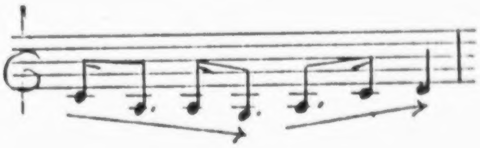
Soloist and retrograde of the opening chorus



Chorus movement for phrase 3



Chorus movement for phrase 4



The second point is the use of the cadence. The physical cadence helps to maintain the group's cohesiveness which is critical to maintain the evenness of the cloth texture. Both the physical and musical cadences overlap throughout the song. The strong pulse of the music meets the pounding cadence and together they provide a strong forward pulse.

The third point is the verse and refrain which serve to match the time required to complete the waulking. Even though several songs were sung for the waulking; the waulking time is predicated upon the purpose for the cloth, such as the type needed by fishermen for protection in sea storms. But, the verse is also a communicate of recent news--of husbands at sea, of single members of the village, and of other news which would be of interest to those women, who did not read or write. The alternation of verse and chorus gave the soloist and the chorus a short time to rest and participate in just the waulking.

Fourth, the repetition and length of the song are determined by the soloist. In a group pattern, the participant is integrated into the waulking. Neither the solo/chorus nor the pounding part is complicated, but the combination may be difficult to maintain without the group support. There would be a particular social group pressure to continue working on the task until it is completed. This responsibility most likely would be carried out by the leader.

Fifth, the soloist or leader may initiate a change by concluding a song whenever it became necessary to check the cloth, or to determine if the cloth was finished. Sometimes the leader may desire to begin another subject, using a different song, to maintain the concentration of the women. Perhaps a song with a longer or shorter verse or refrain would be needed to finish the cloth, because close to the end of the process it is lighter in weight. The recording does not indicate extreme dynamic levels in the women's voices. This may be a technique used to help maintain the women's vocal strength, especially as they neared the end of the long process.

Sixth, the tempo of the song is quick, and the metronome pulse is approximately 100 at the start and ends at approximately 112. It is not easy for these women to move a cloth which has been soaked in a liquid solution and has become very heavy. Certainly, there is a unique emotional contrast within each person which may sum up to a balance between the heavy cloth and the quick, lively tempo of the rhythmic song, which moves between the group and the soloist. This work requires a particular endurance different from milking a cow, weaving, or other more sedintary tasks, during which time less rhythmic songs are sung by these women.

In addition to the socializing and work purposes of the "orain luaidh," there are several musical aspects to note in this waulking song. These aspects are cited below and can be seen in the transcription, which will be found in Appendix D.

1) The waulking style has the short notes held a little longer than indicated on a printed page and the reverse for the long notes which are expected to be shorter than written.

2) The chorus enters approximately at the same time. However, the listener can hear the increase in volume after the first tone for the chorus.

3) There is no break between the soloist's part and the chorus' entering.

4) | = higher than the written pitch

| = lower than the written pitch

5) Slides into the syllable pitch are indicated as / or \.

6) S = Soloist or leader

C = Chorus or group of women

7) The waulking pattern is continuous during the singing.

8) The accents are notated.

9) Gaelic text and music will be found in Appendix D.

10) No vibrato was noted in the voices.

11) For each verse, three of the four phrases end with a whole note ascending movement to the final tone.

12) The chorus section uses several vocables. Phrase four repeats those used in phrase two.

13) There is no attempt to blend the voices of the group and this would not be a critical part of this work song.

14) If one is to note a trademark of this song, I could suggest that the contour of the tones resemble the waves of the sea and thus serve to heighten the meaning of the text while giving tension and release to the singers' movements.Also, one cannot neglect the uniqueness of the Gaelic language, which places an accent on the first syllable of most compound words.

15) The rhythmic blend of the singers is a credit to their efforts to work and sing in unison.

One finds true admiration in the realization that these aspects which I have discussed in this paper actually occured as a natural and assumed practice during the waulking. However, being an outsider and being far removed from this practice, I can still appreciate this art through the research of the "orain luaidh." It is through this study

I have gained the significant socializing, work, and musical implications as offered by the Scottish waulking song.

Fr. Allan McDonald at a waulking on the island of Eriskay in the summer of 1898. (Photograph by Walter Blaikie)

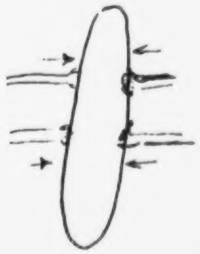
Appendix A

HEBRIDEAN FOLKSONG p.8-9

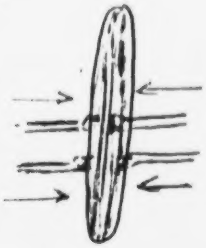
WAULKING POUNDING POSITIONS

Each of the following movements equals one beat of the music.

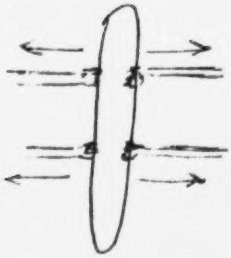
Position No. 1



Position No. 2

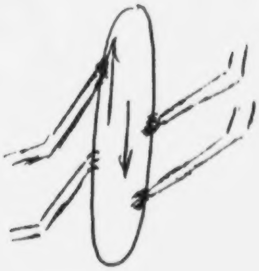


Position No. 3



Position No. 4

Clockwise rotation



Appendix B

Thig am bàta

Thig am bàta àill i ó
Ro àilleagan àill i ó
Moch am màireach hai ó/aol ó
Ro àilleagan àill i ó
Bidh m'athair innt
'S mo thriùir bhràithrean
Mo chéile donn
air ràmh bràghad
Gheibh iad mise
air mo bhàthadh
Togaidh iad mi
air na ràmhan
Mo bhreacan donn
snàmh na fairrge
Mo chuailean donn
measg nan carraicean
Cha b'e 'n t-acras
chuir do'n tràigh mi
Miann an duileasg
miann nam beàrnach
Falbh na tràghad
Soiridh eile
gu mo phàisdean
Fear ac' dà bhliadhn'
fear ac' bliadhna
Am fear bliadhna
nacheil làidir
Dh'fhàg mi e
anns a' chùlaist
Iarraidh e nochd
cloch a mhàthar
Ma dh'iarr chan fhaigh e
ach sùgan sàile
O mo mhallachd
aig bean eudaich
Dh'fhàg i mise
'S an sgeir bhàthte
Thig am bàta
moch am màireach
Gheibh iad mise
air mo bhàthadh

The boat will come

early tomorrow

My father will be in it
and my three brothers
My brown haired husband
on the breast oar
They'll find me
drowned
They'll lift me up
on the oars
My brown plaid
swimming the sea
My brown locks
amongst the carageen
It wasn't hunger
that sent me to the strand
or craving for dulse
or limpets
To walk on the strand
Another farewell
to my little ones
One at two years old
one of one year
The one year old
who is not strong
I left him
in the back room
He'll ask tonight
for his mother's breast
If he does
he'll get only sea-water
Oh my curses
on the jealous woman
She left me
on the rock of drowning
The boat will come
early tomorrow
They will find me
drowned

Appendix C

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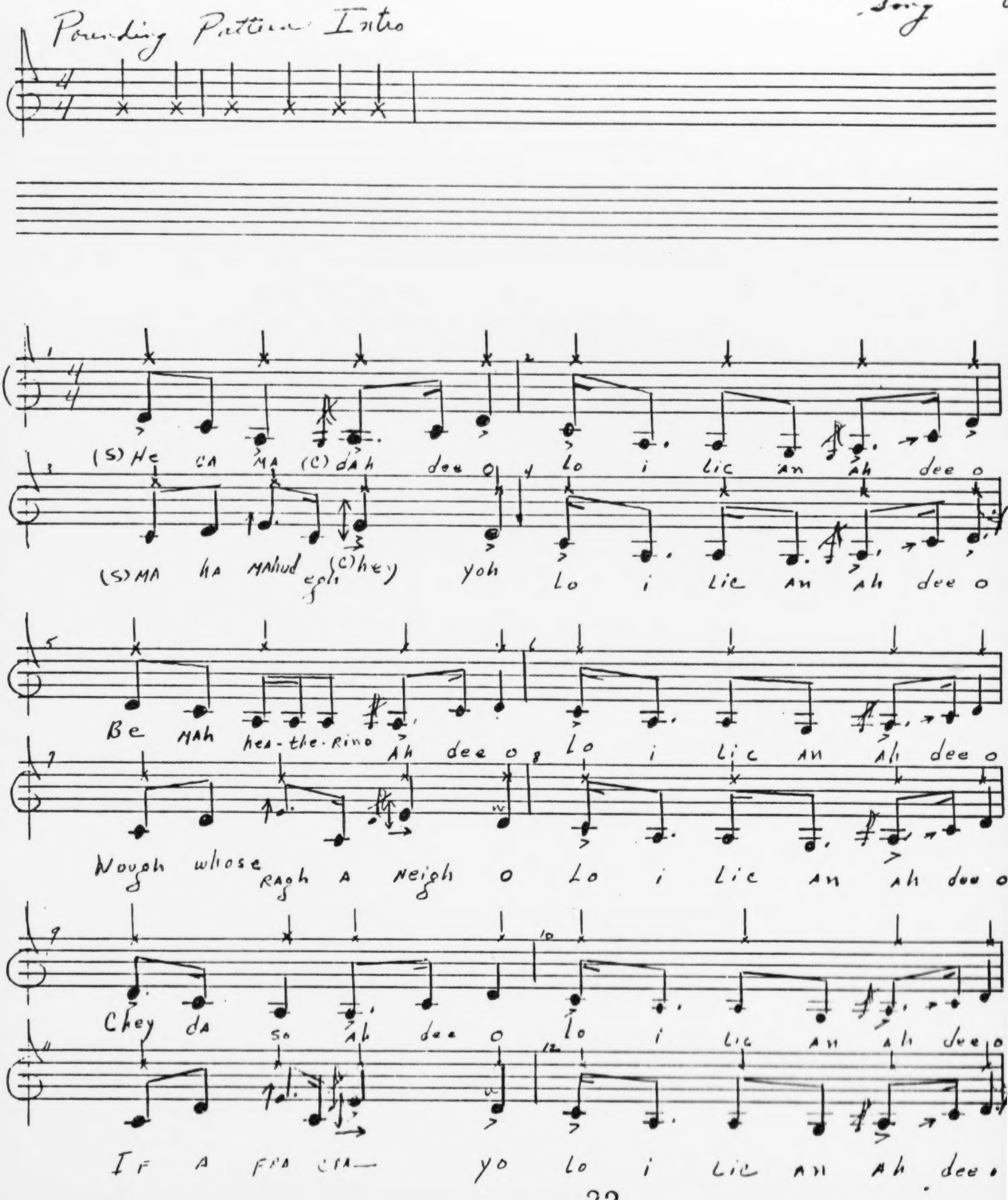
PERSONAL INTERVIEW

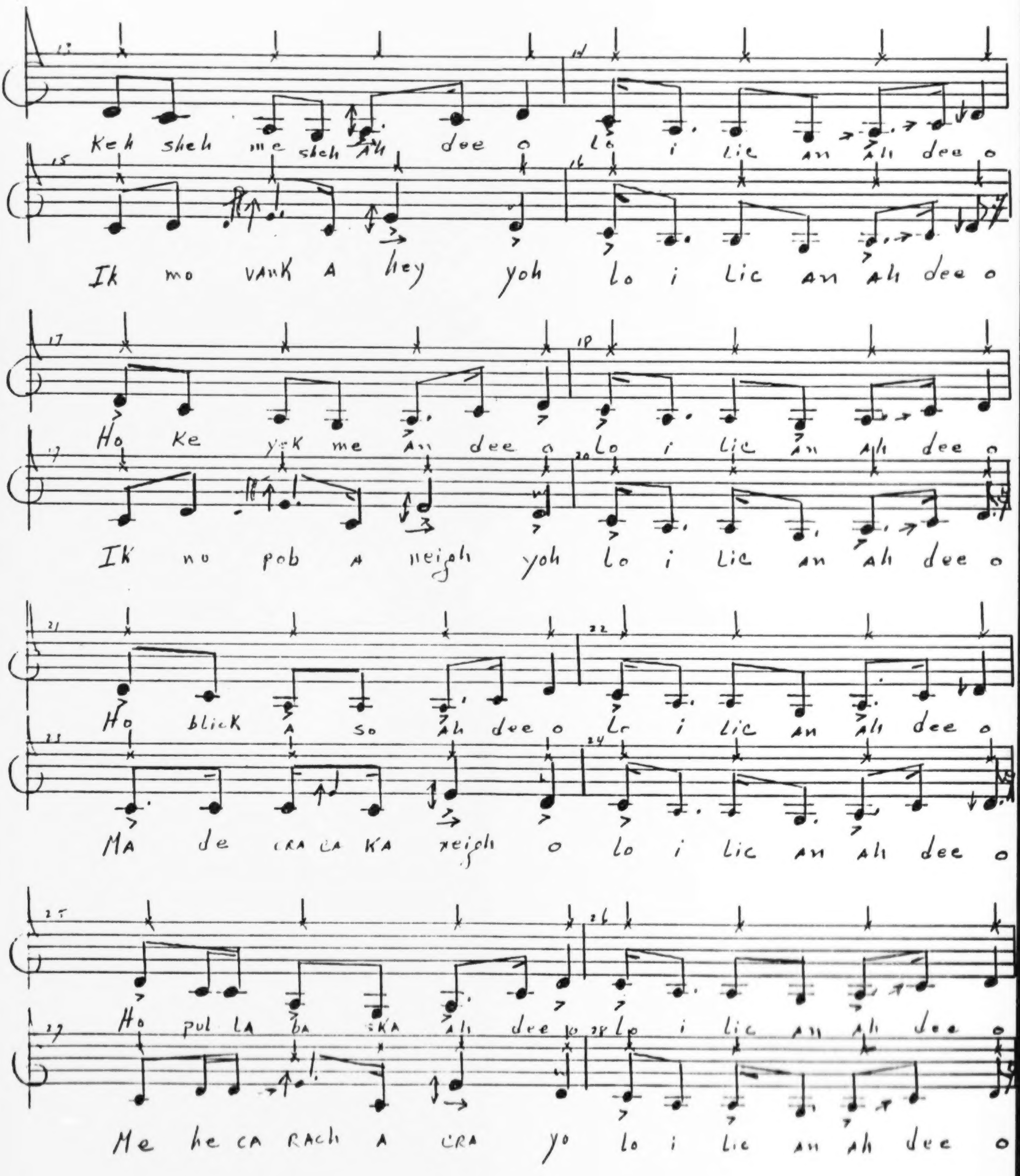
Cairistiona ni Dhomhnaill

Little Rock, Arkansas

Thio am bÁtA
(The Boat will come)

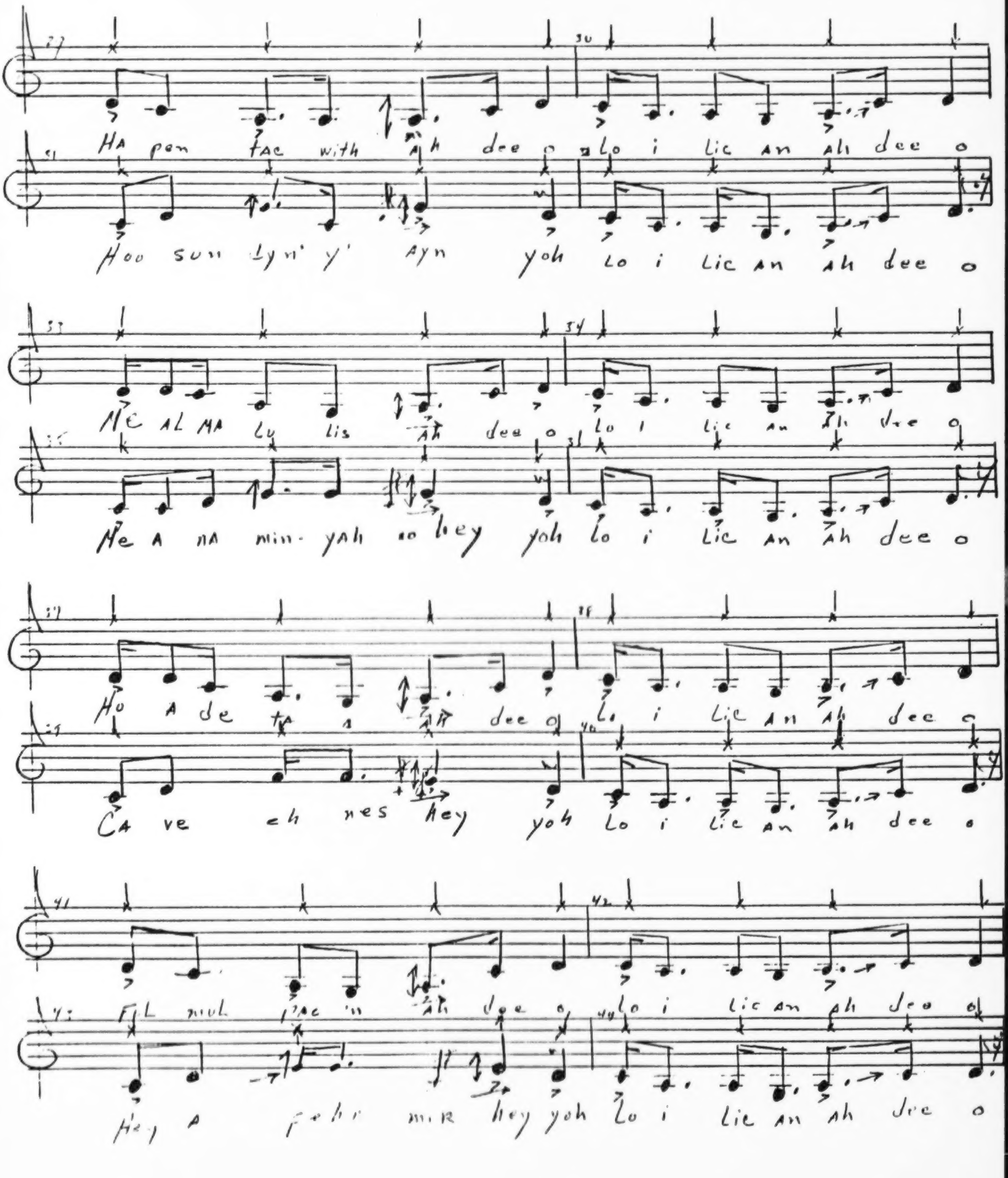
Kimma Hardy
Final Project
Scottish Waulking
Song


Pounding Pattern Intro
(S) He ca ma (C) dah dee o lo i lic an ah dee o
(S) ma ha mahud egh (C) hey yoh lo i lic an ah dee o
Be mah hea-the-rino ah dee o lo i lic an ah dee o
Nough whose ragh a neigh o lo i lic an ah dee o
Chey da so ah dee o lo i lic an ah dee o
If a fra cra— yo lo i lic an ah dee o

13 14
Keh sheh me sheh Ah dee o Lo i Lic An Ah dee o
15 16
Ik mo VAnK A hey yoh lo i Lic An Ah dee o
17 18
Ho Ke yek me An dee o Lo i Lic An Ah dee o
19 20
Ik no pob A neigh yoh Lo i Lic An Ah dee o
21 22
Ho blick A so Ah dee o Lo i Lic An Ah dee o
23 24
MA de CRA CA KA neigh o lo i Lic An Ah dee o
25 26
Ho pul LA bA sKA Ah dee o Lo i Lic An Ah dee o
27 28
Me he CA RACh A CRA yo lo i Lic An Ah dee o

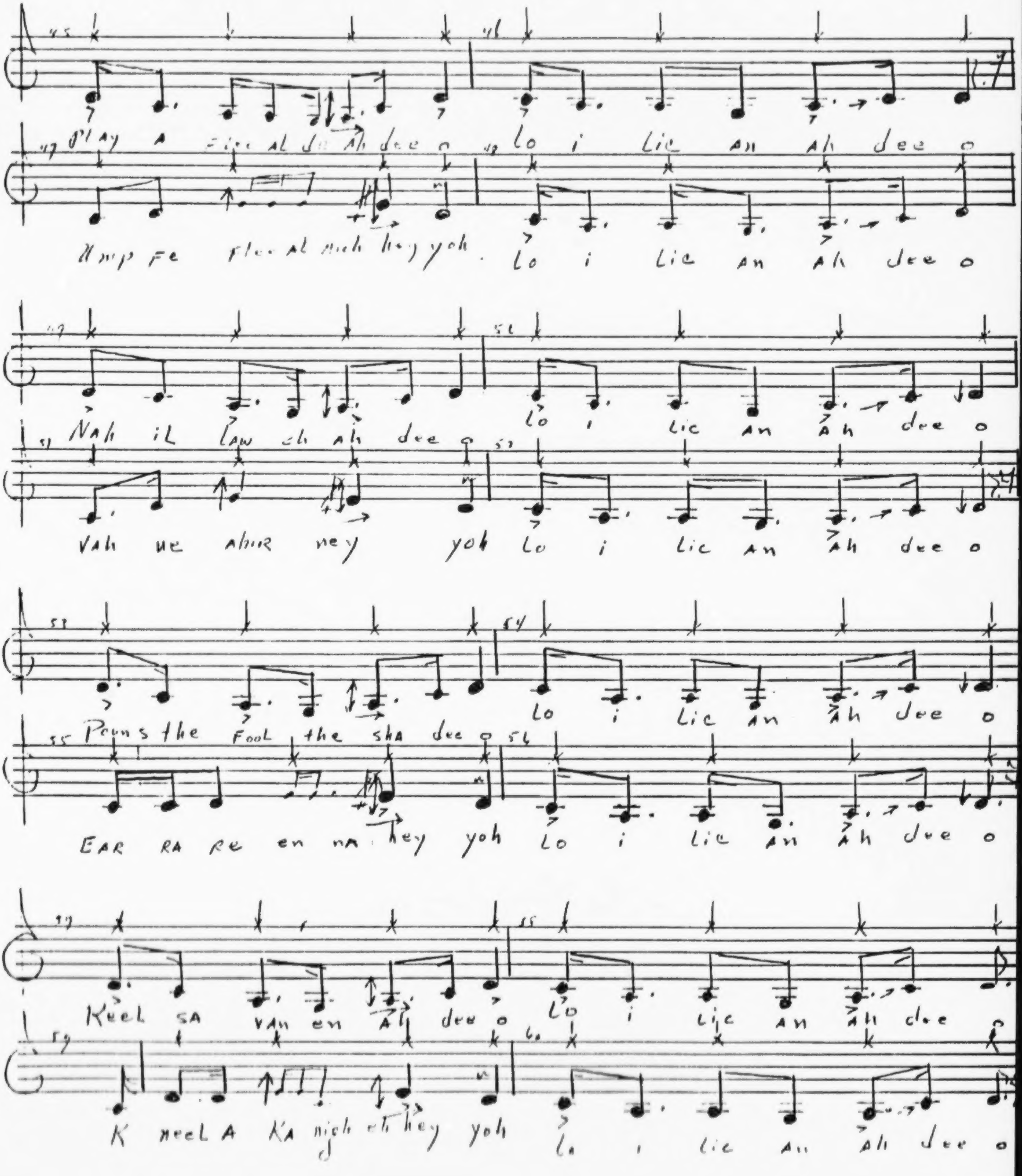
p 3

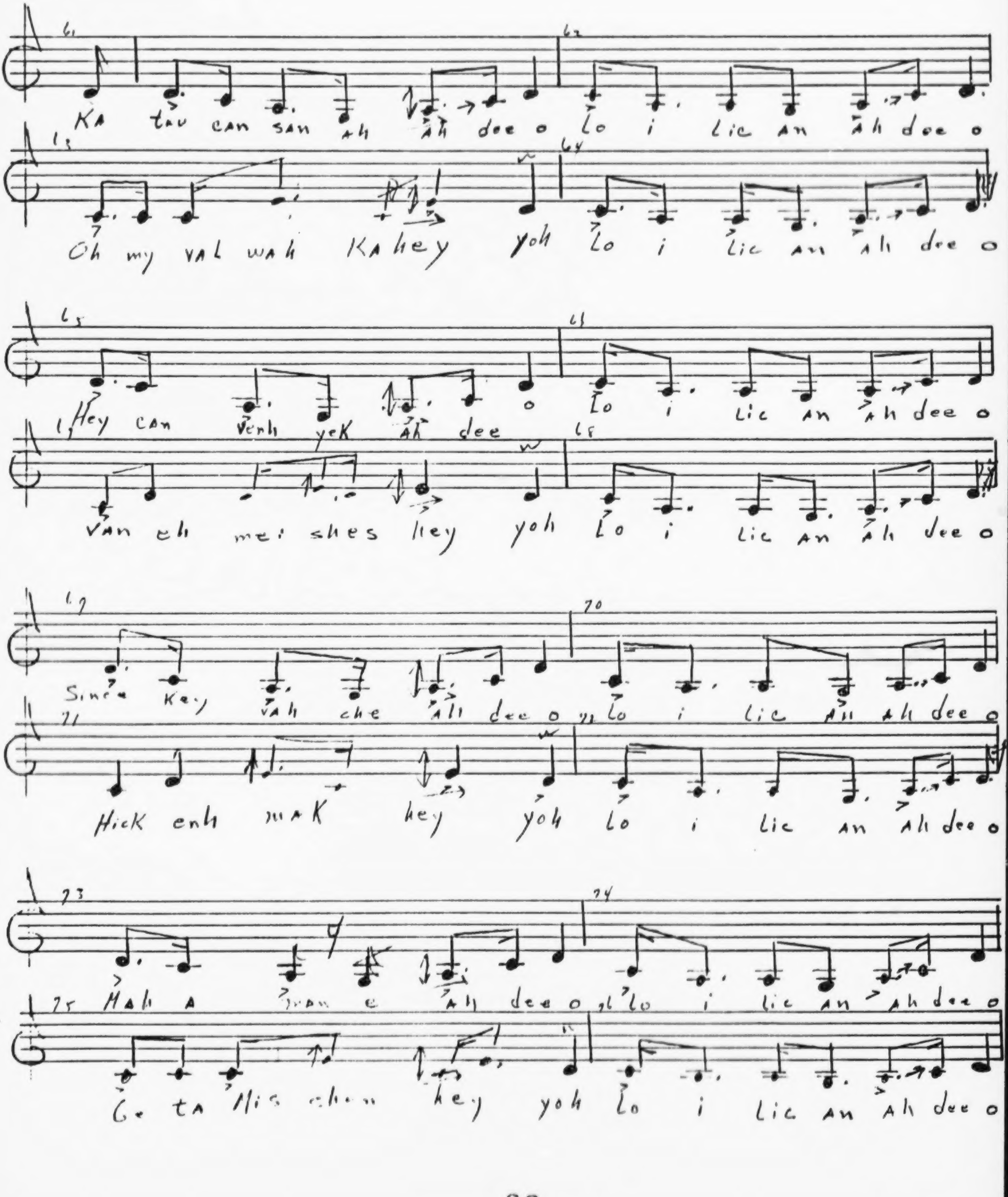
Donna Hardy



29 Ha pen tac with ah dee o 30 lo i lic an ah dee o
31 Hoo sun lyn' y' ayn yoh 32 lo i lic an ah dee o
33 He al ma lu lis ah dee o 34 lo i lic an ah dee o
35 He a na min- yah no hey yoh 36 lo i lic an ah dee o
37 Ho a de ta a ah dee o 38 lo i lic an ah dee o
39 Ca ve eh nes hey yoh 40 lo i lic an ah dee o
41 Fil muh pac 'n ah dee o 42 lo i lic an ah dee o
43 Hey a fehr mir hey yoh 44 lo i lic an ah dee o

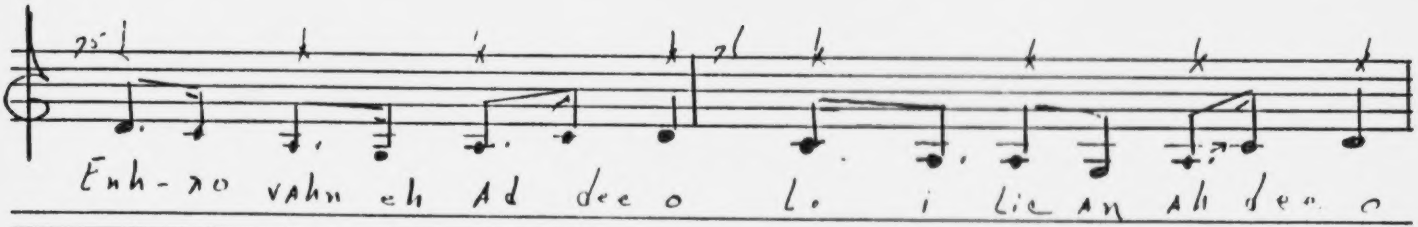
[illegible]


45
46
47
48
PLAY A Fire AL de Ah dee o
Lo i Lie An Ah dee o
Ump Fe Flee AL mich hey yoh
Lo i Lie An Ah dee o
49
50
51
52
Nah iL Law ch Ah dee o
Lo i Lie An Ah dee o
VAh ne Ahir ney yoh
Lo i Lie An Ah dee o
53
54
55
56
Peons the FooL the shA dee o
Lo i Lie An Ah dee o
EAR RA Re en nA hey yoh
Lo i Lie An Ah dee o
57
58
59
60
KeeL SA VAn en Ah dee o
Lo i Lie An Ah dee o
K neeL A KA nigh eh hey yoh
Lo i Lie An Ah dee o


Ka tau can san ah Ah dee o Lo i Lie an Ah dee o
Oh my val wah Kahey yoh Lo i Lie an Ah dee o
Hey can Venh yeK Ah dee o Lo i Lie an Ah dee o
Van eh mei shes hey yoh Lo i Lie an Ah dee o
Since Key vah che Ah dee o Lo i Lie an Ah dee o
Hick enh mak hey yoh Lo i Lie an Ah dee o
Mah a Iran e Ah dee o Lo i Lie an Ah dee o
Ge ta Mis chan hey yoh Lo i Lie an Ah dee o

p. 6

Donna Hardy


Enh-no vahn eh Ad dee o
L. i Lie an Ah dee o

Song pitches one half step lower than the transcription shows

Comments on the transcription:

1. Usually the chorus is late, flat, and sharp when it begins in measure three of each verse.
2. The "o" at the end of measures 1,2,and 4 of each verse is approach through a creas. starting the beat before.
3. Leader begins her part in the rhythm consistently.
4. During the sixteenth rest at the ends of several verses, the listener can hear the chorus "gasping" while the soloist moves ahead with her part.
5. S represents the leader; C represents the chorus.
6. The predominant interval is the minor third; the widest interval is the P4. The Major 2nd is the smallest interval outside of the gliss. approaching tones.
7. The beginning dynamic level is generally maintained to the end of the song.
8. There is a gradual lowering of the pitches throughout the song and the final verse and chorus are ½ step lower in pitch in comparison to the first verse and chorus.
9. lv Pitch begins a little below, goes above, and settles to the written tone.